

Minister for Environment and Climate Change
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David Stewart MSP
Convener
Public Petitions Committee
T3.40
Scottish Parliament

In 2014 Scotland Welcomes the World



GLENEAGLES
SCOTLAND 2014

5 August 2014

Dear David

CONSIDERATION OF PETITION [PE1500](#)

Thank you for your letter of 11 June 2014. I am sorry that we were unable to get a reply to you in time to meet your deadline. I understand there was a problem with the email address to which your letter was sent.

Your letter asks two questions:

- whether you feel a case has been made to pursue the request for a national bird of Scotland; and
- whether a suitable mechanism has been identified for such a designation to take place.

I would like to say first of all that I am definitely not opposed to the idea of a national bird for Scotland, and neither am I opposed to the proposition that, if we do have a national bird, the golden eagle would be a good candidate.

However I am not convinced that a persuasive case has yet been assembled in favour of Scotland having a national bird or for the golden eagle to be that national bird. I understand the arguments put forward by the RSPB and others that having the golden eagle as a symbol could help deter crimes against birds of prey. I certainly share that aim. I also agree with the argument that the golden eagle symbolises the wildness that characterises large parts of Scotland. But it seems to me that there are probably other arguments that could be put forward in favour of other bird

species that should be heard and considered before we go ahead with a decision to put forward the golden eagle.

There is also a wider discussion to be had about national symbols generally – what do we want of them, and what other types of national symbols might we want to consider. I recognise that we now have a national tree, the Scots Pine, however I feel that choosing these symbols is more than just an environmental or ecological question.

It was for this reason that I expressed the hope that we might get a more rounded picture by asking other Parliamentary committees for their views. I appreciate that you have done this and received some responses, but I would still prefer that we find a way of getting a considered view from the Parliament about the value and purpose of national symbols and hopefully avoid the potential for ending up with national symbols proposed and designated on what is essentially an ad hoc basis.

As far as the process for designating a symbol is concerned, you will be aware of the procedure that was devised for the Scots Pine designation. That process did involve some public consultation and I believe that involving the public would be a vital part of any future procedure, and indeed I hope that we could find a way to encourage a wider public engagement in the issue than has been the case so far.

Kindest regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Paul Wheelhouse'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial 'P' and 'W'.

PAUL WHEELHOUSE